

LOCAL NEWS

Orderly shortage no surprise for advocates

Health. Advocates for institutional care aides (*préposés aux bénéficiaires*) in the English-speaking community say the disastrous labour shortage that has been partially blamed for a spike in COVID-19 deaths in seniors' residences has been in the offing for years.

And that was before the COVID-19 crisis. "For people working in CHSLDs, the pandemic could not have come at a worse time," Begley says.

As a result of COVID-19, over 1200 nurses and orderlies in CHSLDs are on sick leave or otherwise unable to work. And until recently, relatives who normally cared for residents were not allowed to do so.

Politicians have suggested various solutions, including asking doctors to provide nursing care and calling in Canadian Forces medical personnel.

Recruitment

Recruiting also presents a problem, according to Joe Cacchione, principal of the Shadd Health and Business Centre, near Montreal Children's Hospital. The Shadd Centre is an English Montreal School Board (EMSB) which trains orderlies and home care assistants.

"We advertise and go into job fairs and get most of our students through word of mouth...but we can't always fill programs to capacity," he says.

A provincial government bursary program for institutional and home care assistance was announced in August 2019; the \$15-million program aimed to recruit and train 30,000 new orderlies and home care



Students in the institutional and home care program at the Shadd Health and Business Centre pose with an instructor. Principal Joe Cacchione says he understands why many graduates don't stay in the field long, preferring to move on to other health professions. /COURTESY EMSB

assistants. Cacchione says it may help attract students, but the impact of the bursary couldn't be gauged before the pandemic upended everything.

Enrolment has dropped according to Education Ministry, going from 944 students in 2016 to 814 last year. Although the initial job placement rate for graduates is 95 per cent, many move on quickly.

"People think that it's easy, but they don't always think of the importance [of

care aides' work]," Cacchione says. "It's great to see that the government is finally concerned with [aides' working conditions] now. Raising their salaries would be good for the [graduates], and fair, considering what they do."

Legault has said that previous attempts to raise orderlies' salaries failed when unions insisted that other health care workers' salaries be raised proportionally, an expense the government was unable to take on.

Litterature. Saint-Laurent libraries come to your living room

Saint-Laurent libraries are kicking off their spring and summer cultural and educational programming, but like every scheduled public activity in this pandemic year, all activities have been moved online.

For young children who may be missing storytime, story hours for all Montreal libraries are available at heureducontc.ca, live and pre-recorded. English and bilingual story hours are scheduled several times a week, organized by the Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec (BANQ) and the Blue Metropolis Literary Festival. Arts and crafts activities for young children are regularly posted on the *Les Bibliothèques de Saint-Laurent* Facebook page.

A digital book creation workshop (April 22) and a 3D modelling workshop with the modelling program MagicaVoxel (April 29), aimed at children aged 8-12, will take place via the online conferencing platform JitsiMeet. All software used in the workshops is free and participants need parental permission.

These workshops are in French, although the borough is looking into possibilities to allow participants to ask questions about workshop content and get answers in English.

Anglophones and adults speaking other languages who are hoping to use this time to improve their French can sign up for regularly scheduled conversation workshops offered online through the library by emailing Raphael Lavoie at raphael.lavoie@montreal.ca.



All libraries cardholders have access to the *Bibliothèque numérique* (digital library) which includes a panoply of e-books, online newspapers and magazines and educational software. Montreal residents who don't have a library card can request one online.

Waiting for the word

Whenever the city allows libraries to reopen, residents should finally be able to get a firsthand look at the new Vieux-Saint-Laurent library. "The renovations at the Vieux-Saint-Laurent library are finished, so its reopening depends entirely on what public health authorities say," borough communications officer Marc-Olivier Fritsch says.

Several public events are scheduled at the borough's three libraries for the coming months, including an English-language conference on memory and aging on June 3 at the Vieux-Saint-Laurent library, in partnership with McGill University.

"We're in discussions with our colleagues from the city and from other boroughs as well as with our partners, to make sure that our services are adapted as best they can be to this complex and constantly changing situation," says Fritsch.



"Since 2006, all public sector health care workers, including orderlies, have been losing wages relative to inflation," says Jeff Begley, president of the FSSS-CSN, the union which represents most public sector nurses and orderlies in the province. "Since 2015, when the [Liberal] government reformed the health system and made major cuts, the workload has increased and sick leave has gone up by 40 per cent because of the workload."

Begley says an internal union survey from last year found an "intense" level of psychological distress among orderlies and in-home care providers.

Transport. Bixi Bikes Return to Saint-Laurent

Despite much uncertainty regarding its status in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the launch of BIXI services proceeded as scheduled last week.

According to Montreal's regional public health department, the decision to proceed with the launch was made to facilitate the travel required for essential workers.

To support health care personnel, BIXI will offer a free 30-day subscription to all employees of Montreal's public health institutions. It includes hospitals, CLSCs, CHSLDs, and youth centres.

"With the crisis, we are currently experiencing, the service is becoming an additional option that facilitates the daily lives of workers," said Eric Alan Caldwell, a member of the city's executive committee who is responsible for urban planning and mobility.

Things will not be business as usual for BIXI, as the company will be implementing new protocols for disinfecting and cleaning equipment. Every bike is disinfected according to new standards. Surfaces frequently touched are also disinfected on a regular basis with bleach, particularly with regards to the terminals and touchpads used for rentals.

BIXI will be posting instructions to users on their social media platforms and at each bike terminal. They include frequent hand washing and maintaining a minimum distance of two metres between cyclists and other people.

"Our priority has been to collaborate with the regional public health department and to respect its recommendations in order to make BIXI services available in a responsible manner," said BIXI

general manager Christian Vermette.

Second year

In 2019, the BIXI network expanded to include the borough of Saint-Laurent, as well as four others because of their high probability of travel.

"Welcoming more and more new residents and workers to our borough, the Saint-Laurent Administration must respond to the new mobility needs," Saint-Laurent Mayor Alan DeSousa said at the time. "Having tried BIXI, I think it's a wonderful tool that will be popular option among Saint-Laurent residents."

Over 600 stations and 7,200 bikes are available to BIXI users. Over the summer, 1,000 new electric BIXI bikes will be added to the network.

DANIEL SUCAR

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